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TO MY WIFE.

FAIR, my own darling, are the flowers of Spring. . . .
Rathe primrose, violet, and eglantine,
Anemone and golden celandine:
Not less delicious all the birds that sing
Carols of joy upon the amorous wing,
Earine, in these sweet hours of thine.
Spring's youngest sister art thou, Lady mine,

Child who hast love for every living thing
Of earth and air. A moment now I linger—
Linger, and think of thee, and give thee this
Love-gift of rhymes made when my spirit was free.
If thou wilt touch it with a white forefinger—
Nay, if the volume thou wilt deign to kiss—
Surely my verse shall live, Earine.

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THE INN OF STRANGE MEETINGS.

I

Down in a stream-fed valley stood the Inn
Whither I came upon a summer day
Weary, for I had toiled through garrulous din
Of stifling towns where men must work alway,
And by long desolate tracks where human kin
Seemed to pass never. Now before me lay
A sweet green coombe, through which fresh brooklets run,
And the great Hostel sleeping in the sun.

II

A curious Gothic building, many-angled,
With carven cloisters in a delicate row,
By flowering creepers hidden and entangled:
Stands the stout landlord in the portico,
Full of grave humour, costumed in old-fangled
Jerkin and hose. His visage has the glow
That like an altar-flame is wont to flicker
About the priesthood of the god of liquor.

III

Straight from the house projects an oaken pole
Whence an inexplicable sign is pendent.
The painter must have been some maddened soul
Born when the wildest stars were in the ascendent,
Whose brush was restive, and disdained control,
Whose careless colours singularly splendent.
No matter: words beneath are written fair . . .
INN OF STRANGE MEETINGS is the legend there.

IV

'Inn of Strange meetings!' As my thirsty steed
Stoops to the hurrying rivulet, I ponder
What this may signify, and if indeed
It may be safe the ancient Hostel yonder
To enter. But of food and wine my need
Is sore, nor do I care my strength to squander
On farther travel: so I throw to a groom
My reins, and pass into a lofty room.

V

Lofty and sombre and oak-wainscoated,
But with patrician portraits on the panels
Of stately dames, of cavaliers who bled
Upon the foremost fields of England's annals,
What time our dauntless kings their armies led,
And warfare reddened all the river-channels
Of 'that sweet enemy, France.' My England! then you
Deemed fame and love things nobler than revenue.

VI

Above the fire-place, where great red logs smoulder,
Although it is the heart of summer tide,
Painted full length, no younger and no older,
Than at this moment standing by its side,
I recognise . . : and faith! my blood runs colder
Somewhat . . *Myself.* Yes, in my prime and pride,
Eyes that look dreamy, lip that arches merrily . . .
Myself, by Zeus. 'Tis a strange meeting, verily.

VII

Ere I had time to wonder, lo! there enter
At once a servitor and servitress:
Not Mephistophiles is macilenter
Than the man, who bows to me with quaint excess
Of courtesy. As to the maid, they've lent her
Some curious witchery, for in mien and dress
She certainly reflects as close as may be
The wench that nursed me when I was a baby.

VIII

Ay, she was once the guardian of my nursery,
In days of dancing bells and dainty corals,
When my acquaintance with the world was cursory,
Nor cared I for its customs, manners, morals.
My life has since seen many an anniversary,
Has had its plagues and passions, joys and quarrels:
But I remember Betty. Kind and clever
She was. 'Tis odd that she's as young as ever.

IX

The masculine waiter in his suit of sable
Sets to his work like lightning. Damask white
Deftly he spreads upon the dark oak table;
Tall flasks, Venetian goblets chrysolite,
Pasties high-walled and cates unutterable,
Soon crown the lordly board, a jolly sight.
Says cheerful Betty, once nurse-maiden mine,
'Sir, will you see your room before you dine?'

x

'What next?' I marvel: but I follow her
Up a steep winding staircase, saying nought;
With trust in Time, that sure interpreter
Of mysteries that transcend our strength of thought.
To a room whose stately bed with miniver
Is covered, by the maiden I am brought.
Icy the lymph in the ample basin poured
Of silver carved. I wash, and am restored.

xi

A tall west window opens up the glen
Festooned with multitudinous blooms unknown,
Some having faint sweet scent of cyclamen,
Some like May-lilies dropt from Venus' zone
On Ida hill. I pluck a floweret: then
It flutters, trembles . . . seems to make a moan
Of murmurous music . . . from my fingers flies
A woman, winged, of Lilliputian size.

XII

Three inches high, and not a single decimal
Beyond she is, the lovely fairy figure—
An airy Aphrodite infinitesimal
Who'd break a myriad hearts if she were bigger.
She plays fantastic antics—who could guess 'em all?—
A sylph of volatile and voluble vigour.'
With silver voice exclaims the tiny sinner,
'Sir Hugo, you must take me down to dinner.

XIII

'Don't be astonished . . . I'm your Grandmamma.
You've seen my portrait down at Creçi Court
As I appeared at one-and-twenty. Ah!
Those were delicious days and full of sport:
Men used their rapiers with a fa-la-la,
And weren't afraid of passion or of port.
But why should I regret if earth grows colder?
Come, let us dine.' She perches on my shoulder.

XIV

Thus I descend, my reason warped awry.
No opium-eater or nepenthe-drinker,
I am intensely puzzled to know why
These things occur. My Grandam, must I think her
Goblin or sorceress? Can I be I?
Or am I like Christophero Sly the tinker—
That thirsty vagabond not worth a rap, astray
In lordly chamber hung with amorous tapestry?

XV

Sudden as change in the intriguing Spanish
Drama, whereof one Calderon was king,
Is the next transformation. Ringlets vanish
From the gay sprite my wits bewildering.
Her joyous smiles my moody fancies banish—
For lo, no longer she's a tiny thing,
But curtseys low, a creature full of fun,
Maddeningly beautiful . . . and five feet one.

XVI

We sit at table. What I eat, who knows?
Or what I drink, or what I think or say.
My sweet companion, blushful as the rose,
Talks music and laughs moonlight. Joyous day!
I cease to marvel what may be thy close:
No minute of thee will I cast away.
When the behaviour of the Fates is handsome,
Each beat of the pulse is worth an Emperor's ransom.

XVII

Now all at once the jet-clothed butler brings
A huge cup mulberry-tinged, with effervescent
Wine that seems tremulous to some wild harp's strings—
A fluid of pale amber, unquiescent.
Then suddenly from that strange lymph upsprings
A vapour volatile and evanescent,
Which quivers, wavers, and the shape assumes
Of a red rose-tree overfilled with blooms.

XVIII

Divine the fragrance of those phantom flowers,
An exhalation from the laughing luminous
Lymph of great Bacchus. I remember hours
Of youth and mirth and love 'neath trees cacuminous.
Odour is linked with memory, has strange powers
A life that's drowned in Lethe to resume in us.
So, when I smell those roses, well I know
How smiled my lost love . . . lost long years ago.

XIX

Such roses wore she in her wondrous tresses :
There grow none like them now in any garden.
They died when she died. . . . Did she die? Who guesses?
For there are living graves where young hearts harden,
And somebody perchance her corpse possesses,
And thinks it a live woman. O, your pardon!
These spectral roses put my tale in danger.
Now I'll go on. There's more to tell—and stranger.

XX

For suddenly unfold two mighty doors
Into another chamber, and I see
Others beyond with richly-covered floors.
Music is heard, and laughter silver-free,
And all at once a great procession pours
Through the far halls. Young pages, three by three,
With doublets slashed, and ribboned silken hose,
And then bright maidens ruddy as the rose.

XXI

To right and left disparting as they enter,
Gay groups of boys, of damsels many a bevy,
Colour the rooms. Knights stride into the centre,
Easily moving underneath the heavy
Coats of chain-mail. Then one, with voice like Stentor,
Makes loud announcement to the radiant levée,
Crying: 'Oyez! oyez! draw to either hand!
Place for Sir Hugo, from the Holy Land!'

XXII

Where have I seen that stately stalwart form,
The true presentment of a knightly giant
Made to ride fast through war's hot thunderstorm,
With shaggy eyebrows and stern mouth defiant,
Yet in whose eyes such swift expressions swarm
You'd say a lady's love would make him pliant?
The memory of that man no time could cancel,
Where have I seen him? 'Twas in Creçi Chancel.

XXIII

Creçi in Dreamshire; cradle of my race;
A quaint old-fangled out-of-the-way lazy
High-Tory village—but the loveliest place
That ever drove a landscape-painter crazy.
Its Church preserves the true Twelfth Century grace,
Its bells are coppice-crowned, its valleys hazy,
Its merry maidens fit for heart-entanglers,
Its rapid trout-streams the delight of anglers.

XXIV

In days when I, like Shelley's friend Alastor,
Was fond of solitary wanderings,
When my young blood raced fierier and faster,
When my young spirit shaped impossible things,
When there appeared no shadow of dire disaster
On my life's mirror, then no bird that sings
In Creçi knew its fields and streams and sky
And woods and houses half so well as I.

XXV

I knew the ancient village every inch,
I knew the scolding quean that kept the Dragon,
The cobbler's well, that had a broken winch,
The cobbler's self, that ne'er refused a flagon,
The Belle of the Village, scornful at a pinch,
The mighty-shouldered man who drove the waggon:
I knew them all, in daylight or the dark—
I also knew the Parson and the Clerk.

XXVI

And often haunting silent Creçi Church,
I made a friend there—Faith, a man of brass!—
He was not like to leave me in the lurch,
For in the Chancel, on a mountainous mass
Of stone he lay. To move him from his perch
Would puzzle elephant, camel, horse, or ass,
My great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandsire . .
I see him living now . . . and I admire.

XXVII

Ay, this is he—the statue rather battered
Of Creçi Church—alive and full of vigour.
The ancient statuary by no means flattered,
Lord Hugo; he is brave, jollier, bigger,
As well I see, when through the groups all scattered
He moves towards me, a stupendous figure,
And gravely says, 'You recognise my face
Of course. *I am the Founder of your Race.*'

XXVIII

Now with the sound of that great knight's slow saying
I seem to pass back many centuries.
It is another world I am surveying
Than this of comforts and philosophies:
There is a passion-storm the nations swaying
Of Faith that shatters old idolatries,
And a sworn soldier of that Faith am I.
But, '*Where is the Lady of my Love?*' I cry.

XXIX

By odours and by music and by light
Surpassing violets, lutes, the silver moon,
Is heralded a damsel dressed in white
Apparel, closely cincturing the boon
Curves of her form. She treads the hall aright
As if she moved to some inaudible time,
And her eyes touch me like a fire, and her
Small mouth becomes my soul's interpreter.

XXX

As in a hill-tarn dark upon Helvellyn
Come sudden gleams to break the gloom quiescent—
As rise the scintillating sparks that dwell in
Some old imperial wine made effervescent
By Dionysus—so i' th' eyes of Helen
As she moves toward me through the quivering crescent
Of girls and pages, do the love-lights cluster,
And I am smitten by the well-known lustre.

XXXI

Yes, I remember Helen now. A married
Maiden was she, for on the bridal day
I left her weeping, as the great host tarried
For us, and all the fleet was under weigh.
So in my heart a fiery hope I carried
And a cold memory, on my warlike way.
But me the Paynim slew: my virgin Bride
Was laid in Creçi Chancel when she died.

XXXII

Death . . . there is no such thing, though foolish fears
Of the future our despondent spirits quell—
'O sweet love, over half a thousand years
Thou art come back to me, and all is well.
Now there is absolute end of bitter tears—
Through the long corridors let music swell,
Ordain the bridal, let the minstrels come
With a voluptuous prothalamium.'

XXXIII

'Tis done. Mad mirth intoxicates the jester
Who sings quaint songs that make the maidens titter
And blush, while the pages shower down many a tester.
On the long tables golden vessels glitter.
I, being an inveterate detester
Of festivals which make existence bitter,
Say to my Helen, 'Let us slip away
And tell what happened since that hapless day.'

XXXIV

So, while Lord Hugo and his followers revel
In honour of the bridal now renewed,
While prelates prose, knights laugh, girls play the devil,
We, at a distance from the multitude,
O'erlooking a still pool, set in a level
Of emerald turf, enjoy our lonely mood,
Whispering sweet follies in the lover's way,
As if we had parted only yesterday.

XXXV

And Helen tells me that she cannot number
The hours or days or years that softly glided
In absolute delicious dreamless slumber
By no sharp pulses of time's wave divided . . .
Measureless sleep: while I, whom dreams encumber,
By the keen clash of gross events collided,
Can only marvel am I worthy of her
Who had forgotten I was once her lover.

XXXVI

Forgotten! She asleep beneath my feet . . .
I pining for the unremembered face.
But while we talk, and while our glad lips meet,
And while the mystic past we strive to trace,
A blaze of flambeaux bursts on our retreat
Borne by young damsels clad in girlish grace,
Whose laughing leader points a wand afar
Toward orient Hesperus, love's own sweet star.

XXXVII

We are led forth amid the mystic moan
Of music sad with love unutterable
To ascend the wide slow stair of carven stone,
So wide a troop of mounted knights were able
To climb it easily. When the door is thrown
Open, I see clad in a cloak of sable
A skeleton form with lurid light above,
Who says, '*I am the Lover of thy Love.*'

XXXVIII

I draw my good sword from its sheath and smite.
Down falls the ghastly thing. My bride goes through
Into the sacred chamber's softened light
Attended by her maiden retinue,
Who flutter round her like a flock of white
Doves round their Queen, and seem to softly coo:
For Hymen fills them with an amorous fear,
And in the golden twilight he is here.

XXXIX

But they depart, shy-blushing, backward-glancing,
And we are left in utter silence, save
That distant music on the air is dancing
As sunlight dances on the summer wave—
Music like wine our ecstasy enhancing . . .
But suddenly it sinks into its grave—
With one strange magical cadence leaves us lonely,
Whose meaning is, *Love always and Love only.*

XL

Now from my tall fair bride the rich attire
Deft fingers have removed. Her happy eyes
Softly gaze on me with a tear-quencht fire.
She stands like some Greek Lady of the Skies
In marble cut for millions to admire.
But she is mine alone, and Love is wise.
Let the sweet fountains of our life o'erflow!
This should have happened centuries ago.

XLI

Visits our chamber Sleep, perennial wonder.
For me, I sleep not, but I gaze on her
Whose eyes are hidden blue-veined eyelids under,
Whose delicate pulses only faintly stir,
And think . . . Now are we wholly reft asunder,
Though 'neath one coverlet of miniver?
And has her sweet soul sunk away again
Into the underworld of patient pain?

XLII

For pain it must be to be loveless, though
Sleep may appear delicious. Helen! whither
Hast thou descended, that I may not know,
And with love's perfect daring track thee thither?
I mark the invisible warm breath come and go
Through lips half-parted—mark the dense night wither
Into pure day—and for this knowledge yearn,
If thou, my bride, with sunrise wilt return.

XLIII

Lo the gray shafts of unfatigued Apollo
Search the dim chamber where the low lamps flicker:
Soon will the young god's keener arrows follow,
Making all puny mortal lights burn sicker,
Smiting the mists on every pool and hollow.
Brighter the morn grows and my pulse flies quicker,
As gazing on my bride I whisper low,
'Those darling eyes will open soon, I know.'

XLIV

Even while I think this thought the vision vanishes,
For suddenly I drop into the deep
Gulf that all memory of the moment banishes . . .
The oblivion absolute of perfect sleep.
I pass to Dreamland, where the Castle Spanish is
The edifice in fashion. Fly or creep
The sequent hours I know not . . . This I know:
Again I lose my love, lost long ago.

XLV

Yes, she is gone, this morning. I awake
To divine sunlight, and sweet fragrance flowing
Through the wide windows, while rare blossoms take
All early beauty of the daybreak glowing
High in the East. For lovely Helen's sake
I love these fair delights: but when I am going
To kiss my lady of the loosened zone . . .
Alas, the agony! I am left alone.

XLVI

Alone! And where is she? From that lone couch
Suddenly starting, to the chamber door
I spring: when lo, a churl with villanous slouch
Attacks me, followed by a dozen more.
The issue let the dull coward's doom avouch,
With his own cudgel smitten sharp and sore.
Dead, perhaps. His fate is worth nor tear nor smile;
My rapier should not touch a hound so vile.

XLVII

Helen is gone . . . and whither to pursue her
I know not. Soon accoutred, I pass down
The stately stair, up which the music drew her,
In that sweet hour to wear Love's roseate crown.
The place seems smaller now, the steps seem fewer;
No courteous knight, no damsel pale or brown,
Treads the long corridor where yestertide
They gloried in the beauty of my bride.

XLVIII

What means this transformation! Lo, the burly
Landlord still standing 'neath his portico.
I question him: the rascal shrewd and surly
Stares like an idiot, and seems nought to know.
Deserted is the Hostel, though the early
Sun casts long shadows where the great trees grow.
'Bring out my horse,' I cry—and ride away,
Half wondering if I dreamt that yesterday.

XLIX

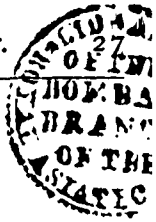
Forward to Creçi: Helen must be there.
Through grassy glades I ride, o'er chalk-veined hills,
By many noisy rivulets, winding fair
'Mid clusters of the dancing daffodils.
As sinks the sun I drink my native air,
The nestling swallows' little liquid trills,
The robins singing in the evenglome,
Make the first music that I hear at home.

L

Windily veer the vanes on many a turret,
For the wild West has suddenly upstarted,
And, like a cat a mouse, appears to worrit
The deep delicious woodlands happy-hearted :
Each great oak grumbles as the swift soughs stir it.
But I begin to feel my grief departed,
And take the tossing tumult of the season
To freshen me, like the strange bath of Aeson.

LI

Exquisite clear the sunset time. I witness
The Sapphic swallow swimming in the blue
Where white clouds perish. With a curious fitness
That voyager's nests appear as if they grew,
Built with an easy lazy bit-by-bitness . . .
If I were not a poet, I'd be you,
Swift swallow, whom such changeful mood possesses,
Creature of impulses and idlenesses.



LII

I pass into my ancestral halls, and meet
Such welcome as befits the stranger-master:
The pert ancilla flutters foolish feet,
The shrewd old steward anticipates disaster,
The bailiff babbles of the price of wheat,
Deep groans the butler that his wine flowed faster
Than he had calculated. Hang the riot!
Would I were in the chancel, dead and quiet!

LIII

Thither I'll go at midnight, if the sexton
Is some bucolic lout I can discover.
But first I'll surely dine, and go unvext on
The oddest errand ever tried by lover.
Dinner . . . the cook is curiously perplext on
My coming, but I like her eggs of plover
In aspic . . . and I'm rather glad my fellows
Have left me some few bottles of Bucellas.

LIV

Now I'm alone, with port in my decanter
That my grandfather bottled long ago :
The famous fluid has been getting scanter
Since the thin clarets have begun to flow
Through the Gladstonian tap. I feel instanter
More strength in me, to see the beeswing glow
Isled in the violet wine, which good luck wins
From dusty depths of cobweb-covered bins.

LV

I hold my goblet up, and each scintilla
Scrutinize pleasantly . . . and as I view it,
My ancestral portraits, *ille atque illa*,
Laughingly leave their framework and eschew it.
The Founder of the Race [not Squire Gorilla,
Darwin's progenitor] is first to do it.
In the great room they gather, strange to see.
Comes Helen from the throng, and kisses me.

LVI

Hoc discunt omnes, ante Alpha et Beta,
Puellae : so the cruel Roman satirist.
'Tis true enough, from countess to *cosmeta.*
Thou, moral poet, writing elsewise, flatterest.
But why in the world should anybody treat a
Topic so fair unfairly? Rain that patterest
In the sweet spring-tide with a slow soft cadence,
No lovelier art thou than moist mouths of maidens.

LVII

Comes Helen. How the virgin vision touches
The quaint wide room with light illimitable!
O vague faint form that my strong fantasy clutches!
O beauty volatile, unsafe, unstable,
Whose permanent existence far too much is
For firm belief! I am the fool of fable,
And wicked demons with some mischievous plan turn
Upon my path a monstrous magic lantern.

LVIII.

Let me read Greek, to see if I'm awake.
Homer the immeasurable—Aeschylus
Of gloom sublime—sweet Sophocles, a lake
Reflecting life, calm and melodious—
Rare Aristophanes, the merry rake
Who brings Athena's city home to us:
Neither to-night: my resolution firm is—
I'll try the humorous old Hymn to Hermes.

LIX

'Hymn Hermes, Muse, the son of Zeus and Maia,
Lord of Cyllene and Arcadia's flocks,
The gods' luck-bringing messenger. How shy a
Nymph was the Pleiad of the lustrous locks,
Mingling with Zeus in love! She, fain to fly a-
-far from the gods, amid tree-shaded rocks
Dwelt in a cave, where Zeus was wont to meet her,
While white-armed Here slept, none ever sweeter.

LX

'Fit now to mighty Zeus fulfilment seems;
Comes the tenth month; a boy of speech ornate,
Thief, cattle-stealer, marshal of mad dreams,
Watcher for night, and guardian of the gate,
Maia brought forth. His fame already gleams:
Early to do great deeds his fortunate fate.
Dawn-born, at noon he framed the lyre divine,
At eventide he stole Apollo's kine.'

LXI

I don't believe it, but it does not matter.
'Tis a delightful old extravaganza
Which need not cause the critic owl to chatter
Since Shelley turned it into octave stanza.
[Of course the critic, though, must make his clatter,
Being the Quixote-poet's Sancho Panza.]
But I digress. Two more quaint stanzas, say,
And then farewell to the wily son of May,

LXII

'Meanwhile young Hermes in his cradle listening
Laughed to himself amid the fragrant clothes;
Then suddenly he cried, with bright eyes glistening,
"Come, let us swear a peace with solemn oaths.
Ye nymphs, get water ready for my christening,
To quarrel is a thing my spirit loathes.
Archer Apollo, list my babyish prattle:
With thee I clearly am unfit to battle."

LXIII

'When the Far-worker then beheld the boy,
An infant tossing in his cradle white,
He said: "Is this a gift of sorrow or joy,
This baby-comer to Olympus height?
He turns a tortoise to sweet music's toy;
He steals sleek-shouldered kine, my chief delight;
And yet, so eloquent the young curmudgeon,
I cannot take his rascally tricks in dudgeon."'

LXIV

Useless the interruption. From the folio
Of rough Greek type, the ghosts of old Greek days
Make with these modern ghosts a maddening olio.
But Homer had his Helen, 'mid the haze
Of antique myth; and if one drank rosolio
Or haschish or nepenthe, and should gaze
On Paris now, which hideous fools destroy,
One might imagine it a worser Troy.

LXV

Well—as I said—my love, my bride, my wife,
Is here, and gazes on me piteously.
It seems that reason and passion are at strife
As she comes in with strange humility.
'O love and lord!' she cries, 'O love and life!
O author of my maiden agony!
Am I forgotten utterly? Am I
Left in the cold dark chancel vault to die?'

LXVI

Strange; for it is not long since her white form
Lay in my arms, and all the lights burnt dim
In the old haunted chamber, weird and warm,
And no ghosts tortured the entwining limb,
Nor any ghouls of the charnel dared to swarm
Round that sweet Sister of the Seraphim.
Strange that the Authorities did not find in *her* face
And figure quicker passport to the surface.

LXVII

'Helen!' I say . . . no more . . . not any more.
And she looks on me with a loving grace
Caught from the saintly spiritual shore,
Yet possible only on a perfect face.
'My lord, my life, my soul, whom I adore . . .
We have been separate long . . . time flies apace:
And very weary is the tomb to me,
The world to you. Now how shall this thing be?

LXVIII

'Shall I come back to you? Or will you go
Into my world more early?' Then say I:
'Your world, my child, we soon enough must know,
And much have I to do before I die.
For every day the fools more numerous grow,
And who can smite them swifter 'neath the sky?
So you shall come to me, my sweet, my sweet,
Treading an untrod path with fairy feet.'

LXIX

Helen obeys me: women all obey
Who are true women. Ah, the happy time!
When the long cloud of centuries passed away,
And love's immortal light, transcending rhyme,
Smote my dull life with a miraculous ray.
The story's true. In this slow sordid clime
Where stockbrokers grow gold and farmers clover,
Magic and mystery are not quite over.

A POET'S PHILOSOPHY.

I

A SAFFRON crescent in an opal sky
He watched—while she into her wine-dark hair
Braided white violets—whiter than despair,
And half as sweet as love. There fluttered by
Wings of the merle, gay caroller, who sleeps
Upon a beechen bough in the far forest deeps.

II

This cottage on the mighty forest-verge
Was placed: primeval woodland, where the deer
But seldom might the huntsman's bugle hear.
The great oaks thundered like the ocean-surge
When came a tempest. Alpine hills afar
Caught in the crimson east the lustrous evening star.

III

More of the Garden than the Portico
Was his philosophy who dwelt therein.
He was not fain 'mid the mad world to win
Power or renown from the sparse overflow
Of Fortune's horn. To him three things were fair—
True Love, unfettered Song, and the wooing Summer-air.

IV

That wooing air that wiles the red rose forth
To fling its passionate fragrance everywhere—
To lay its crimson heart all torn and bare
On Summer's altar. Not the bitter north,
Keen-cutting as an Arab scimetar,
But that which feels the touch of Sirius, scorching star.

V

That wild free song which will not wear a fetter,
Such as was mastered well by loving Shelley
(Pure poet, down-ridden in the world's hot *mêlée*),
Or such as Shakespeare uttered, careless setter
In Orient gold of perfect amethysts,
Whom men must marvel at, while the great world exists.

VI

That absolute love which many women feel,
But men how few! Not winds which icily
Breathe freshness underneath a twilight sky,
When swift Apollo's burning chariot-wheel
Flies westward, bear to mortals such delight
As that most perfect love, unselfish, infinite.

VII

Without it, marble-templed cities reaching
Long piers into the sea were but as dens
For untamed beasts—as most unwholesome fens,
Stagnant and damp. Without it, the beseeching
Bosom of Nature, whereon poets lie,
Were but a cromlech gaunt, on which men well might die.

VIII

With it, the air we breathe intoxicates
Our spirits with unceasing glee: the sky
Rains music from its blue immensity;
Rhyme, rhyme immortal on our utterance waits;
No end, no efflux of our joy can come—
For we are demigods, and earth's Elysium.

. . . . . .

φίλυμνος, φίλυπνος.

IX

Lo, SONG and sleep I love. For song's susurrus
Is the soul's wine throughout the weary days:
And silent sleep, restorer of decays,
Smooths from the fretted brow the deepening furrows;
'Tis the true Fountain of Jouvence, unfound
By knight or troubadour in the far forest ground.

X

Anacreon's tettix, singing in the trees,
Unworn by age, and like the gods therein—
Or the amorous thrush, that does at dawn begin,
Nor ceases till there's sunset on the seas:
These are the lords of melody, for whom
Earth has no touch of sadness, death no dream of doom.

XI

But we have mortal form, material tissue;
And as the heavy centuries come and go,
Closer the clay clings, wearier human woe,
Fewer the lips wherefrom true song may issue.
More sluggishly the poet's pulses stir
Than when the gay Greek wore the golden grasshopper.

XII

And yet, Earine, do violets white
In thy sweet season kiss the wooing south;
Still hath the cyclamen its ruddy mouth,
And five fine petals made of liquid light:
Still at the early dawn's delicious burst
A myriad tawny throats their music have dispersed.

XIII

Death is the ocean of immortal rest:
And what is sleep? A bath our Angel brings
Of the same lymph, fed by the self-same springs:
Dip in it, and freshen the despondent breast,
And taste the salt breath of the great wide sea,
Where shines 'mid laughing waves a far-off isle for me.

XIV

Why fear? The light wind whitens all the brine,
And throws fresh foam upon the marble shores,
Or it may be that strong and strenuous oars
Must force the shallop o'er the hyaline:
But welcome utter calm or bitter blast—
The voyage will be done, the island reached at last.

XV

O the precipitous cliffs, the amber sand,
The drowsy valleys musical with brooks,
Asphodel glimmering in shadowy nooks,
Far slopes of virgin turf where oak trees stand
Which in forgotten cycles Rhaicos knew
Ere her maimed messenger to the Hamadryad flew.

XVI

If we are weak with immemorial strife,
If sadder destiny each æra weaves,
Yet listen to the lyrics 'mid the leaves,
Look to the life beyond the verge of life.
Let the dull lecture and the womanish weep:
To the Poet leave the wine of song, the realm of sleep.

. . . . . .

'We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.'

XVII

Dew on the lawns, and fragrance of fresh flowers,
And magical song of mellow-throated birds—
A beauty untransmutable to words:
Such is the vision of the morning hours;
When fade the urns of night in saffron skies,
And light and love return to young dream-haunted eyes,

XVIII

Earine has sucked the breath of Spring—
And I have touched thy lips, Earine,
What time the Dawn came from the purple sea,
And forests fluttered to the waving wing
Of the unwearying Angel who doth sweep
Back upon heavy hinge the porphyry gates of sleep.

XIX

Delicious thus to enter Morning Land:
The world is wondrous, for the world is new;
Dim drosera is all o'erdrenched with dew.
Ah, well might Merlin wake in Broceliande,
And see the daybreak through the oaks that wave
Where ivy and violet grow on his melodious grave.

XX

Will it be thus when the strange sleep of death
Lifts from the brow, and lost eyes live again?
Will Morning dawn on the bewildered brain
To cool and heal? And shall I feel the breath
Of freshening winds that travel from the sea,
And meet thy loving laughing eyes, Earine?

XXI

Is life a dream, and death a sleep, and love
The only thing immortal? Who would care
To be received into the ambient air,
Or traverse æther like a cloud, above
The happy homes of mortals? Must the soul
Be formlessly absorbed into the infinite whole?

XXII

No: I shall pass into the Morning Land
As now from sleep into the life of morn;
Live the new life of the new world, unshorn
Of the swift brain, the executing hand;
See the dense darkness suddenly withdrawn,
As when Orion's sightless eyes discerned the dawn.

XXIII

I shall behold it: I shall see the utter
Glory of sunrise heretofore unseen,
Freshening the woodland ways with brighter green,
And calling into life all wings that flutter,
All throats of music and all eyes of light,
And driving o'er the verge the intolerable night.

XXIV

O virgin world! O marvellous far days!
No more with dreams of grief doth love grow bitter,
Nor trouble dim the lustre wont to glitter
In happy eyes. Decay alone decays:
A moment—death's dull sleep is o'er; and we
Drink the immortal morning air, Earine.

. . . . . .

'Si mihi Nausicaë patrios concederet hortos,
Alcinoö possem dicere, *Malo meos.*'

XXV

Immortal gardens of the island King,
Set in bright æther of the Odyssey,
With bloom and fruitage on the self-same tree,
Scaturient fountains always murmuring
Through odorous cyclamen and hyacinth,
While roses flush around the marble palace-plinth.

XXVI

Delicious dream! What if Nausikaa came—
The white-armed delicate-ankled Princess who
To the river led her maiden retinue
And found the Hero—saying, with virgin shame
On royal cheek, 'O stranger from the sea,
Rest from thy wandering! Take these: take also me.'

XXVII

Rome's brilliant rascal-epigrammatist
Preferred his Spanish gardens. Likewise I,
Having found my Princess 'neath a grayer sky,
Think England's sunshine, windy rain, white mist,
Turf like the emerald, touched with crocus-fire,
Lovelier than that Greek dream, whose calm would surely tire.

XXVIII

Some thirty miles from Megalopolis,
Miles also from the shrieking griding rail,
On a high road where once the four-horse mail
Flashed gaily past—so placed my cottage is:
Roars merrily now the wind tall limes between,
Which guard my quiet lawn, a triangle scalene.

XXIX

And you may see me, if you pass this way,
Lean on my gate and look into the road,
And listen to the skylark's joyous ode—
Thoughtful, not oft cigarless. Will you say,
'Who wears that velvet coat, a trifle tattered,
That curious cool straw hat, which wind and rain
have battered?'

XXX

Sometimes there comes a friendly visitant,
Brimmed with the life o' the town, rewarding me
Well for my mutton and my Burgundy;
And so we laugh together at fraud and cant,
While everywhere is heard a flutter of wings,
And winter's chorister, the unwearying redbreast, sings.

XXXI

O, but one visitant, the nightingale !
Throb, throb, wild voice, through passionate twi-
light hours !
Love is thy gift from the Eternal Powers ;
Yet in thy song there seems a tragic wail,
Because in Argos, ages long ago,
A poet turned thy lyric wooing into woe.

XXXII

Truly the poet is omnipotent :
His magic alters melody of birds,
Puts life, love, glory, into dead cold words,
Conjures all angels 'neath the gray sky's tent,
Bathes common things in light Hesperian. Thus
My garden I prefer to yours, Alcinoüs.

MARIGOLD

Marigold : qd. aurum Mariae, et colore floris luteo.—*Richardson's Dictionary.*

Marigold : calendula, from *calendae*, there being flowers almost any month in the year.—*Paxton's Botanical Dictionary.*

Ay, in sweet sport I named her Marigold :
For golden haze of the Calendula
Always upon that antique garden lay ;
And the great bulk of her bright hair was rolled
Back from her deer-like head in curious twine
Of gorgeous burnisht gold, splendidly serpentine.

II

And all her fresh flusht face was smitten through
With fervent colour, such as sunlight burns
Into delicious depths of blossom-urns :
But then her eyes were of strange sapphire-blue,
Or that which men have seen in early skies
Ere Phosphor, in the abyss of perfect purple dies.

III

When Summer brooded on her garden-plot,
How lazily the brooklet's wave slipped by !
The cooing doves made sleepy melody,
The bees grew drowsy in their melilot,
The burnt-out odour of magnolia bloom
Came stealing through the arcades to love's own darkened room.

IV

But far away in Megalopolis
There was grave work to do, and after grave
Work the excited brain in lymph to lave—
Which very strong for good and evil is—
Lymph of full pleasure (woman, wit, and wine),
Which tempts the demigod to deem himself divine.

V

You know, Cæcilius, all the dreariness
Of prolix fools' political debate—
All the fierce fret and fever, heat and hate,
Which upon sensitive brains bring strenuous stress
Of torture; all the wicked wild reaction,
Demonaic disgust, and deep dissatisfaction.

VI

I drained the tankard to the very dregs,
Leaving no sign of supernaculum,
Then gazing on myself, with shame grew dumb,
As the epicure who loves his plovers' eggs
If he should see a lapwing. Men continue
To spend their strongest years in waste of soul and sinew.

VII

There came a dream to me. 'Twas Marigold!
O the blue loving eyes and golden coil
Of silk-soft hair! Amid the town's turmoil
Vivid the vision of that garden old
Where bloomed the flower of love; for all men know
Only the flower of love can through all calends blow.

VIII

Still may the soft susurrus of the bee
Linger, and still the cushat's musical coo ;
But will those eyes of strange celestial blue
Look love and peace and pardon upon me ?
Home I return ; soon is the story told—
Waiting behind the garden-gate stands Marigold.

SONNETS AT MIDNIGHT.

I

STRANGE: I sit here, and write my painful prose,
And my sweet love is in the Land of Dreams,
Where bloom weird flowers and murmur mystic streams,
And with wild wilful curve life's current flows,

So what will happen next no creature knows
In that far region: some mad demon seems
To twist in puzzling knots the common themes
Of cheerful day. Now, as her dear eyes close

Under fair lids that I have kissed so oft,
Her spirit is a myriad leagues away
Fast flitting o'er land and sea, or high in air,

Borne by some wondrous witchery aloft.
I want to travel on the self-same way:
I want to follow and to find her there.

II

A mighty Pyrenean wolf-hound lies
Beside me while I work or think or dream,
And midnight passes like a mystic stream,
And in the icy blue of winter skies

Star after star grows wonderful and dies:
To me those bright orbs yield no glory or gleam,
Snug, curtained, and intent upon my theme,
Wrapt in myself. Even so my great dog sighs

Close at my feet, in visions of the chase
Of wild wolves howling over hills of snow,
Slain by his stalwart fathers, long ago.

My thoughts within him have no resting-place:
Of me he knows just what of him I know.
Strange is the stern fate that hath made it so.

OLIVE WAYNFLETE'S SONG.

I

SWEET it is by the Summer river
Where oleanders blush rose-red,
When the delicate eyelids quiver,
When with kisses young lips are fed.
Ay, you have known it! Own it . . . own it!
This is the joy the good gods send:
Love's gay rhyme is older than Time is . . .
Ah, but all must have an end!

II

Love was made to madden and plague us,
Fresh as the flowers of the river-bed,
Sharp as the sword that's dipt in Tagus,
Sad with delight and sweet with dread.
How would you earn it? Spurn it . . . spurn it!
Then will its joy on your heart descend.
Ah but the crime is, merciless Time is . . .
Yes, for all must have an end!

THE GUITAR.

I

Ah, once it was a stately tree
Whose summit caught the morning star—
And now it is sole friend to me,
My sad guitar.

II

When fluttered by the south wind's breath
Gay music lived in every leaf—
Now to my heart it murmureth
Low songs of grief.

III

In circles swift the swallows sped
Its whispering boughs around, above—
The swallows with the summer fled,
Life fled with love.

IV

Ghost-music of the glorious tree
That reigned upon the hills afar—
Sweet are thy mournful songs to me,
My own guitar.

THE MAGIC FOUNTAIN.

I

MIGHTY of old was the City: a great King ruled therein,
A monarch of wide wild conquest, a monarch of cruel sin:
Close by the gate of the Palace a magical Fountain rose,
And all who drank its waters forgot for a while their woes.

II

But the King said: 'Far more precious than rarest draughts of wine
Is the stream that rises ever from this free fount of mine:
Yet the country lasses drink it, and churls of common clay.
Up with a gateway of granite, and drive the mob away!

III

So the magical Fountain struggled within its prison of stone,
Like the mighty heart of a Poet by scornful men unknown,
In the City the people murmured, ever below their breath—
For the frown of the King was a scourge, and the word of the King was death.

IV

There came a great betrothal: a Princess was to wed
A Prince of another nation: and lo the old king said . .
'Rarer is magical water than wine of high account,
Fetch thou a stoup, my daughter, of the lymph of the Magic Fount.'

V

Tripped the beautiful Princess down the stairs of stone,
Bearing a golden pitcher, blushing, dreaming, alone;
Softly she raised the cover: the water arose in its might,
And she fell in its cold embraces upon her bridal night.

VI

Angrily rose the flood with a mighty murmuring sound:
The King with his guests of honour, the City and people, were drowned.
And the Magic Mere abideth until the Judgment Day . . .
Unless some knightly diver shall bring the pitcher away.

KANT ON THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY.

O happy February! in which man has least to bear—least pain, least sorrow, least self-reproach!—*Diary of Immanuel Kant.*

I

TWELVE gems, the girdle of the year. . . .
And every year
A name of joy or grief and fear;
Sometimes a creature sweet and soft,
A cruel demon very oft:
Seventy was wild with battle-thunder—
But what of Seventy-one, men wonder,
A maiden year?

II

Twelve gems. Ah, what, on mere and pond,
Can shine beyond
December's icy diamond?
And lo the ruby red of June
With full-flushed rose and song-bird's tune!
April beholds the opal vary.
Dim amethyst to February
May well respond.

III

A happy month. Immanuel Kant,
Hierophant
Of the philosophy dominant,
Because its days are twenty-eight,
Welcomes it from the hand of Fate:
Least it contains of loves that languish,
Of dulness, agony, and anguish,
Swindling and cant.

IV

Metaphysician! I defy
This dreary dry
Month-preference; and I tell you why.
No stretch of time can be too long
For life's gay laugh and love's sweet song:
Add to each merry month a quarter. . . .
My love will only deem it shorter,
And so shall I.

RUPERT'S RING.

BLOW, swift south wind, from those green hills of Surrey,
Which gird our London. In the vernal time
Thy fresh breath greets us 'mid our business flurry,
Fragrant as pendent blossom of the lime.
Ere to the north thy joyous pinions hurry,
Greet a poor scribbler, who in octave rhyme
Is fain to tell a most astounding narrative,
And hails thee, Notus, as a fit preparative.

II

London should surely have its due poetic.
Here from my balcony I see the Palace
Of Crystal shining: oft with anæsthetic
Fluid (called claret) have I crowned my chalice
Beneath that glassy roof. The energetic
Age, with a kind of emulative malice,
Is raising now another—nought's forbidden 'em—
Wholly to dwarf the miracle of Sydenham.

III

I have no fancy for the ugly domes
Of Captain Fowkes. But I delight to see
Those Gothic towers above the city homes—
Towers of the Parliament. 'Tis joy to me,
Lifting my weary eye from learned tomes,
To watch the mighty dial blazing free
O'er the great Town. That cresset seems to stand
A fiery beacon in a giant's hand.

IV

O, there is plenty for the true romancer
To do in modern days. To me, alas,
The Spirit of the Age will make no answer.
From fabulous times my stories I amass,
Dealing with damsel sweet, and necromancer
Potent, and knight no enemy could pass—
With times when, if a man were thief or corsair, he
Began by studying the art of sorcery.

V

Rupert Loraine was of a knightly house,
Gentle, yet stern, an absolute patrician,
In manly matters full of solid nous,
Yet of a most delicious disposition
Towards the ladies. Male rogues could not chouse
Our Rupert; but, according to tradition,
Any young innocent girl might well have tricked him—
Of petticoats he was the helpless victim.

VI

Rupert Loraine was full of power and vigour,
A man of perfect form and resolute will;
No man more manly ever pulled a trigger,
Or urged his swift steed over wold and hill.
Toil had he borne—it had not bent his figure—
War had he known—his pulse it could not still—
One of the heroes was he who maintain
Old England's banner free from soil or stain.

VII

He had inherited a certain ring—
(I tell my story in straightforward fashion)
A noble diamond—a perfect thing
Which Attenborough would have given you cash on:
Rupert would not have sold it to the King,
For 'twas a test of love's true fiery passion:
In a girl's heart to know if love-thoughts linger,
Just kiss her with that ring upon your finger.

VIII

Then—if she loves you—at the touch of lips,
The white light of the diamond has fled,
Not as a star which suffers strange eclipse
When in the wild blue sky its life is dead,
But with a marvellous apocalypse—
The virgin diamond blushes passionate red;
Sudden its icy pureness must depart;
It reddens like a rose's amorous heart.

IX

He tried it first upon a pretty creature,
One Christmas time beneath the mistletoe.
Plump was the girl; of soft round comely feature;
With short crisp ringlets, and a healthful glow
Upon her buxom cheek. The thought might reach her,
Rupert would make an excellent mate, you know;
But as to *loving* him—pshaw, none of that!—
The pretty little girl was much too fat.

X

Miss Plumpness did not faint—she only tittered:
Where was the girl who would not like a kiss
From Vandyke-bearded Rupert, whose eyes glittered
With most mysterious meaning? But there is
In love's own sweet lip-contact an embittered
Ecstasy, making laughter all amiss.
Girl, trust no love, however strangely sweet,
If you can laugh, or he, when your lips meet.

XI

Miss Plumpness tittered. Rupert went away.
He did not test the unreddened ring again
For many a month—till one sweet summer day,
He and a lady, with a noble train,
Rode through the woods that skirt a glimmering bay.
She was a lady full of high disdain,
As pure and calm as Artemis—her eye
Had moonlight in its still serenity.

XII

He kissed her in those woodland haunts, and she
Clung to his lip with that which love resembled.
O the sweet hours they spent beside the sea!
O on his breast how the sweet lady trembled
With love's divine delirium! Can it be
That she, so stately and so calm, dissembled?
'No,' thought young Rupert—yet the diamond ring
Shone on his finger, an unaltered thing.

XIII

'Confound all magic!' thought the gay young knight,
And felt inclined to hurl into the ocean
This gem delusive. 'Surely I have right
To know a thing or two about devotion.
At sultry noon and by the weird moonlight
She loves to look on me. The tidal motion
Is not more true to our attendant planet.
Confound all magic! I'm not made of granite.'

XIV

He was not, that's a fact—unless, perhaps,
Preadamite granite at its very hottest.
Rupert was one of those ridiculous chaps
Against whom common sense records a protest—
Falling for ever into amorous traps—
To whom, O Zeus, thou cruelly allottest
Women as torturers. So, that summer tide,
He woo'd the girl, and thought his diamond lied.

XV

Wooing! Ah me, amid the pleasant woods,
And by the sea's wild marge, and on the heath
Which the sun purples in his painting moods,
How sweet to bind a foolish wild-flower wreath
For the gay girl one loves! Strange solitudes
Where the gray falcon floats, while underneath
The woods are hushed—no birds their songs renewing:
These are the fit localities for wooing.

XVI

Not with this joyous time must I delay :
The lovers parted. When again they met,
Hot Rupert saw with anger and dismay
His lady's eyes upon a rival set—
Her breath, as odorous as the blooms of May,
Was mingling with another's. Stern regret
Was Rupert's : stern the vengeance that he took
Ere the next morn her pillow she forsook.

XVII

For the two cavaliers their rapiers crossed
In the old knightly fashion on the grass,
What time the first fresh breeze of morning tossed
The flexible boughs. A swift and sudden pass
Of Rupert's blade—and a young life was lost.
He left his enemy a soulless mass,
While in her sleep that lady, born to woe,
Was vaguely dreaming of her Romeo.

THE

INN OF STRANGE MEETINGS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

MORTIMER COLLINS

46793

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XXII

He left the terrace lighted by the moon
Where gay groups clustered the great cedars under:
He slowly entered the superb saloon
And looked around it, with a thought of wonder
That one sweet kiss, so sudden and so soon,
Had cured the woe which rent his heart asunder.
Two violet eyes gazed tremulous in his,
And well he knew to whom he gave that kiss.

XXIII

What more? 'Twas Rupert's fate to wed the maiden:
The weary wanderer, from his trouble free,
Bore her, upon his manly breast love-laden,
To pass their honeymoon beside the sea.
O sweet young girl, fit raiment white arrayed in!
O mystic hours of love! Untouched by me
Those days delicious of the early bridal,
Too delicate for song or sweetest idyl.

XXIV

Hot Rupert of the Sword, whose deeds of might
Prompted the lay of troubadours unnumbered—
He whom the Paynim in their panic flight
Cursed by their gods—with carking care uncumbered
Drank the sweet love-draught in divine delight,
And 'mid perpetual calm his spirit slumbered.
Thus did a gay young girl—a darling thing—
Subdue Sir Rupert of the blood-red ring.

MY OLD COAT.

I

THIS old velvet coat has grown queer, I admit,
And changed is the colour and loose is the fit;
Though to beauty it certainly cannot aspire,
'Tis a cosy old coat for a seat by the fire.

II

When I first put it on it was awfully swell:
I went to a picnic, met Lucy Lepel,
Made a hole in the heart of that sweet little girl,
And disjointed the nose of her lover, the Earl.

III

We rambled away o'er the moorland together:
My coat was bright purple, and so was the heather,
And so was the sunset that blazed in the west,
As Lucy's fair tresses were laid on my breast.

IV

We plighted our troth 'neath that sunset aflame,
But Lucy returned to her Earl all the same;
She's a grandmamma now, and is going down hill,
But my old velvet coat is a friend to me still.

V

It was built by a tailor of mighty renown,
Whose art is no longer the talk of the town:
A magical picture my memory weaves
When I thrust my tired arms through its easy old sleeves.

VI

I see in my fire, through the smoke of my pipe,
Sweet maidens of old that are long over-ripe,
And a troop of old cronies, right gay cavaliers,
Whose guineas paid well for champagne at Watier's.

VII

A strong generation, who drank, fought, and kissed,
Whose hands never trembled, whose shots never missed,
Who lived a quick life, for their pulses beat high—
We remember them well, sir, my old coat and I.

VIII

Ah, gone is the age of wild doings at Court,
Rotten boroughs, knee-breeches, hair-triggers, and port;
Still I've got a magnum to moisten my throat,
And I'll drink to the Past in my tattered old coat.

A GREEK IDYL.

I

He sat the quiet stream beside—
His white feet laving in the tide—
And watched the pleasant waters glide
Beneath the skies of summer.
She singing came from mound to mound,
Her footfall on the thymy ground
Unheard! his tranquil haunt she found—
That beautiful new comer.

II

He said—'My own Glycerium!
The pulses of the woods are dumb,
How well I knew that thou wouldst come,
Beneath the branches gliding.'
The dreamer fancied he had heard
Her footstep, whensoever stirred
The summer wind or languid bird
Amid the boughs abiding.

III

She dipped her fingers in the brook,
And gazed awhile with happy look
Upon the windings of a book
Of Cyprian hymnings tender.
The ripples to the ocean raced—
The flying minutes passed in haste:
His arm was round the maiden's waist—
That waist so very slender.

IV

O cruel Time! O tyrant Time!
Whose winter all the streams of rhyme,
The flowing waves of love sublime,
In bitter passage freezes.
I only see the scrambling goat,
The lotos on the waters float,
While an old shepherd with an oat
Pipes to the autumn breezes.

THE IVORY GATE.

Sunt geminae Somni portae : quarum altera fertur
Cornea ; qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris :
Altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto ;
Sed falsa ad coelum mittunt insomnia Manes.—*Virgil.*

I

WHEN, loved by poet and painter
The sunrise fills the sky,
When night's gold urns grow fainter,
And in depths of amber die—
When the morn-breeze stirs the curtain,
Bearing an odorous freight—
Then visions strange, uncertain,
Pour thick through the Ivory Gate.

II

Then the oars of Ithaca dip so
Silently into the sea
That they wake not sad Calypso—
And the Hero wanders free:
He breasts the ocean-furrows,
At war with the words of Fate—
And the blue tide's low susurrus
Comes up to the Ivory Gate.

III

Or, clad in the hide of leopard,
'Mid Ida's freshest dews,
Paris, the Teucrian shepherd,
His sweet Œnone woos:
On the thought of her coming bridal
Unuttered joy doth wait—
While the tune of the false one's idyl
Rings soft through the Ivory Gate.

IV

Or down from green Helvellyn
The roar of streams I hear,
And the lazy sail is swelling
To the winds of Windermere:
That girl with the rustic bodice
'Mid the ferry's laughing freight
Is as fair as any goddess
Who sweeps through the Ivory Gate.

V

Ah, the vision of dawn is leisure—
But the truth of day is toil:
And we pass from dreams of pleasure
To the world's unstayed turmoil.
Perchance, beyond the river
Which guards the realms of Fate,
Our spirits may dwell for ever
'Mong dreams of the Ivory Gate.

ON WINDERMERE.

I

DROOP, droop, soft little eyelids!
Droop over eyes of weird wild blue!
Under the fringe of those tremulous shy lids
Glances of love and of fun peep through.

II

Sing, sing, sweetest of maidens!
Carol away with thy white little throat!
Echo awakes to the exquisite cadence,
Here on the magical mere afloat.

III

Dream, dream, heart of my own love!
Sweet is the wind from the odorous south—
Sweet is the island we sail to alone, love—
Sweet is a kiss from thy ruddy young mouth.

THE ORGANIST.

I

An island set in a winding mere,
Into whose waters a river raced,
Filling the air with a music clear,
Lost in the lake with a gleeful haste:
And deep in the woods of that sacred isle
An ancient chapel was built afar—
The great trees hid that Gothic pile
As the dense clouds hide the evening star.

II

There, where the summer winds kept tryst
With the heavy boughs and strove to kiss 'em,
Dwelt a miraculous Organist—
Whose heart was music—whose fingers lissom
Bade the mighty instrument
Utter such sounds of joy and woe,
As if a passionate sprite were pent
Within, by the magic of long ago.

III

Over to that green island fled
By many a blue aërial path,
All songs by the forest minstrels said,
All pleasant music nature hath:
And the dweller therein had a sorcery rare
Which made the simplest sounds divine:
His heart was a wondrous wine-press, where
Juice from the clusters turned to wine.

IV

The rustic carols in hayfields sung—
Old tunes that fell in the waggoner's track—
Weird music 'twas the woods among
When the marvellous organ gave them back.
And when autumn leaves on the moss fell crisper,
And the great oaks shed their golden locks—
Verily, often that organ-whisper
Mocked the wild wind of the equinox.

V

Each one who heard those blending numbers
Drew thence sweet visions of deep delight,
Free from the care which life encumbers,
Gladdened as if by a sorcerer's might.
Quaint old Baron, in carven chair,
With gouty ankle and eyesight dim,
Felt again the kiss of that maiden fair
Who in youth's rich years was all to him.

VI

Poet who haunted the verdurous track
That led from the lake to the hills above
Listened: the golden age came back—
Red roses blushed at the feet of love;
Stooped to the distant fountain-lymph,
Dipping her vase where ether blue
Was screened by leafage, the naked nymph—
Goat-footed faun peeped slily through.

VII

Girl with cheek like a half-ripe peach—
Playmate of summer on shadowy lawn—
Striving acacia-bloom to reach—
Romping with spaniel—toying with fawn;
Her the marvellous music clutches
As love shall clutch her, a short while hence,
Her happy heart with wonder touches,
And gives new zest to her indolence.

VIII

Mourner—searcher for one sweet face,
Spoiled, ah me! by the angel of death:
One glimpse, afar in the depths of space,
He has caught as he heareth the organ's breath:
One happy echo of low love-rhyme,
Comes from the heart of the buried years,
Such as she sang in the summer time,
Her bright eyes brimming with joyous tears.

IX

And every melody issuing sweet
From the isle of elms, shall still abide
On mortal lips—shall dwell complete
On the endless ripples of time's strong tide.
Beauty must perish and leave men lonely;
Song of the poet must pass away;
Wisdom endures not: Music only
Of all man's joyaunce knows no decay.

A SUMMER SONG.

I

SUMMER is sweet, ay, summer is sweet—
Minna mine with the brown brown eyes :
Red are the roses under his feet,
Clear the blue of his windless skies.
Pleasant it is in a boat to glide
On a river whose ripples to ocean haste
With indolent fingers fretting the tide,
And an indolent arm round a darling waist—
And to see, as the western purple dies,
Hesper mirrored in brown brown eyes.

II

Summer is fleet, ah, summer is fleet—
Minna mine with the brown brown eyes :
Onward travel his flying feet,
And the mystical colours of autumn rise.
Clouds will gather round evening's star—
Sorrow may silence our first gay rhyme —
The river's swift ripples flow tardier far
Than the golden minutes of love's sweet time :
But to me, whom omnipotent love makes wise,
There's endless summer in brown brown eyes.

GONE.

I

O it was sweet! O it was sweet
To watch in the dance those gay young feet—
And to hear the laughter ringing wild
From the merry lips of that darling child—
That girl serene, who scarce seventeen
Happy summers on earth had seen.

II

O it was rare! O it was rare
To smooth the folds of her chesnut hair,
While she murmured some old ballad rhyme,
In the summer eve, which is love's own time,
Her head at rest on my loving breast,
And the sunset dying athwart the west.

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III

O it is sad ! O it is sad
To think of the joys that once I had :
To wander lone over land and sea,
And know that she waits no more for me.
This tress of her fair soft chesnut hair
Is all that the cruel grave would spare.

LITTLE LAURETTE.

I

LITTLE LAURETTE was sitting beside
Her dressing-room fire, in a dream, alone;
A mignonne mixture of love and pride
She seemed, as she loosed her zone.

II

She combed her tresses of wondrous hair,
Her small white feet to the fire peeped out,
Strangely fluttered her bosom fair,
And her lips had a wilful pout.

III

Whoever had seen that little Laurette
Looking so innocent, tender, sweet,
Would have longed to make her his own own pet,
To lie at her fair young feet.

IV

Is it fear that dwells in those weird blue eyes?
For it is not love and it is not sorrow.
Ah, little Laurette, from your dream arise,
You must be married to-morrow.

V

Married to one who loves you well,
Whose wealth to your life will a glory be.
Yet I guess you are thinking—who can tell?—
Of Frank, who is over the sea.

VI

How happy they were, that girl and boy,
On the garden terrace by moonlight met,
When to look in his eyes was the perfect joy
Of that darling little Laurette.

VII

How wretched they were, that boy and girl,
When for the last last time they met,
And he carried away a soft bright curl,
And the heart of little Laurette.

VIII

Pooh, pooh! her heart? Why she hasn't a heart,
She waltzed that night with Sir Evelyn Vere:
Into the greenhouse they strolled apart—
He's got twenty thousand a year—

IX

A house in Park Lane—a château in France—
A charming villa on Windermere.
She made up her mind in that very first dance
She'd like to be Lady Vere.

X

The news will go out by the Overland Mail:
In a month or two poor Frank will hear,
That London has nothing to do but hail
The beauty of Lady Vere.

XI

She'll be Queen of Fashion, that heartless elf,
Till a younger comes, and the world grows cool.
And as to Frank—will he shoot himself?
Well, I hope he's not quite such a fool.

JACK AT THE MILL

T'OTHER day—'twas in summer's meridian—
I, loving to fish and to dream,
Was wont to pay visits quotidian
To Eden's miraculous stream.
With my meerschaum and good pocket flagon,
Right merry the life that I led
By the river that Uther Pendragon
Tried vainly to turn from its bed.

II

One charm had the river, that very
Soon set my poor brain in a whirl;
I used to be rowed o'er the ferry
By the prettiest possible girl.
Her face was a cluster of roses,
The sweetest of buds was her mouth;
She'd the nicest of little Greek noses,
And breath like a breeze from the south.

III

In vain did her neatly-made bodice
The curve of her bosom disguise,
There was news of love's mischievous goddess
In the blue of her timorous eyes.
I, not being very patrician,
(Though I have got an uncle an Earl),
'Mid scenery and weather elysian,
Fell in love with this buxom young girl.

IV

At last, half in earnest, half joking,
I ask her if marry she will :
She drops me a curtsey provoking—
'I'm engaged, sir, to Jack at the Mill!'
Confoundedly bothered and nettled,
I leave by the very next train :
That girl shall be married and settled,
Before I see Eden again.

A LEGEND OF THE DIVORCE COURT.

I

TUDERLEY woodlands breezy and bright
Were alive with the windflower and harebell blue,
Were sprinkled with marvellous shadow and light,
When I went thither to woo.

II

Well I remember those days of yore,
Those still sweet days that can never again
Come up from Dreamland's silent shore,
Though I long for them in vain.

III

O the tender blue in Amy's eyes,
Where the love-light glittered, soft and modest!
And I see her form before me rise,
So delicately bodiced.

IV

And the crescent moon in the sky is faint,
And the sunset-flags in the west unfurl,
And she trips by my side, a maiden, a saint,
All my own—that fair young girl.

V

How the old bells rang in that gray church tower,
And every cloud from the heavens had fled—
'Twas of sweet spring days the very flower
When Amy and I were wed.

VI

Why should I think of the honeymoon,
Of the vague red cliffs and the bright blue sea?
O I drank the wine of my life that June,
When the wind on the sands blew free—

VII

When the seagull dipt and the white sail glittered,
And my gay girl-wife on the sands would sing,
And never a thought of care embittered
My days with that sweet young thing.

VIII

Well, it's over now. We didn't agree.
I like *écarté*. I'm fond of pool.
A man can't die of that curst *ennui*
With a pretty little fool.

IX

Her modiste's bills were large, I thought.
I hated her mother, a sour old girl;
And said, perhaps, what I hadn't ought
Of her stiff old uncle, the Earl.

X

And the devil-black eyes of little Lorette
Made rather a fool of me, that I allow.
And I went out to supper, and got into debt,
And at last came a deuce of a row.

XI

Well, thanks to Sir Cresswell Cresswell, we,
Who were man and wife, are severed again.
It's an easy business now, you see.
* * * Jack, another glass of champagne.

AMY.

SUMMER.

I

Amy the beautiful leaned from the ledge
Of an oriel, snowy with clematis-bloom :
The south wind sighed through the river sedge.

II

Far off, the old sea's resonant boom
Rolled without cease under moon and stars—
Music weird of the midnight gloom.

III

The Giant of Night wore ruby Mars
As a gem on his finger. Hesper shone
Like a beacon over the mountain scaurs.

IV

One amethyst gleam of the sunset gone
Touched the maiden's chestnut hair :
A coronal Summer had set thereon.

V

The wind's low whisper everywhere
Ran through the leaves with a rustle of life,
As I watched my Amy unaware ;

VI

As rose in my heart the deep love-strife
For that sweet girl-blossom in clematis-snow,
To woo her and win her, a darling wife.

VII

She passed from my sight. To the sea below,
Where, under the stars, it coiled and curled
In endless ebb and tremulous flow,

VIII

The restless pulse of a sleeping world,
I went, in the clutch of a sweet unrest,
And watched the banners of Night unfurled,

IX

And the nebulæ widen over the west.
With me went odour of clematis-musk,
And a vision of beauty Saxon-tressed

X

Haunted the depths of the mystic dusk;
And a soft shy glance of a lustrous eye
Dwelt in my heart, as a gem in the husk

XI

Of worthless earth. O musical sigh
Of the summer south wind breathe thou sweet
On Amy, wandering under the sky;

XII

And strew fresh blossoms at Amy's feet,
When deep in the moss the wind-flowers lie,
And afar in the woodland glades we meet.

WINTER.

I

RING merrily out, cathedral bells,
O'er wild wide wolds o'erblown with snow,
Where the tyrant Spirit of Winter swells.

II

But hotter than Summer my blood's free flow:
For the rich girl-blossom is plucked, is mine—
Mine through the valleys of earth to go.

III

O now may I gaze in her deep grey eyne!
For Amy is mine, my own, my bride:
Her absolute beauty, her truth divine,—

IV

Are they not mine? O moorlands wide,
Where the east wind, eddying fierce and swift,
Hurries the snow-storm's turbulent tide,

V

Piling it high in a perilous drift,—
Are ye not beautiful? Will there be aught
Sweeter when maidenly Spring shall lift

VI

Her delicate foot in the woodlands, fraught
With colour and odour? Will there be
Sweeter musical cadence caught

VII

By the wanderer's ear in the forest free,
When vernal rivulets ripple delight
By moss-grown boles of the old elm tree

VIII

To the yellow star-clusters of primrose bright?
O whence this magical golden haze,
This glamour that gladdens the snow-storm's flight,

IX

This incense burning through wintry days
In my happy heart's strong altar-flame,
Sweeter than breath of a million Mays?

X

Only make answer with Amy's name—
Amy the beautiful. Verily this
Is the source whence the mystical glamour came—

XI

A fairy fount in the clematis,
Whose icy waters, murmuring low,
None ever have known, none ever may kiss

XII

But one—but I ! whose amorous flow
On my long earth-travel I shall not miss
Till Death through the temple of Love shall go.

AD CHLOEN, M.A.

(Fresh from her Cambridge Examination.)

I

LADY, very fair are you,
And your eyes are very blue,
And your hose;
And your brow is like the snow,
And the various things you know
Goodness knows.

II

And the rose-flush on your cheek,
And your algebra and Greek
Perfect are;
And that loving lustrous eye
Recognises in the sky
Every star.

III

You have pouting piquant lips,
You can doubtless an eclipse
Calculate;
But for your cærulean hue,
I had certainly from you
Met my fate.

IV

If by an arrangement dual
I were Adams mixed with Whewell,
Then some day
I, as wooer, perhaps might come
To so sweet an Artium
Magistra.

CHLOE, M.A.

AD AMANTEM SUUM.

I

CARELESS rhymer, it is true
That my favourite colour's blue:
But am I
To be made a victim, sir,
If to puddings I prefer
Cambridge π?

II

If with giddier girls I play
Croquet through the summer day
On the turf,
Then at night ('tis no great boon)
Let me study how the moon
Sways the surf.

III

Tennyson's idyllic verse
Surely suits me none the worse
If I seek
Old Sicilian birds and bees—
Music of sweet Sophocles—
Golden Greek.

IV

You have said my eyes are blue;
There may be a fairer hue,
Perhaps—and yet
It is surely not a sin
If I keep my secrets in
Violet.

AN OLD ALMANAC.

I

An ancient fogy, fifty-five,
Utterly past all frolic and fun,
I think of the days when I was alive—
There was blood in the veins of Twenty-one.
I take from the shelf an old old book,
With a date scarce seen on its dingy back,
Eagerly through its leaves I look . . .
'Tis Twenty-one's old almanac.

II

Easter Day was April twelve:
Do you remember it, Amy, you?
Though deep in the churchyard mould I delve
Yet shall I not find those eyes of blue.
Beautiful garrulous sweet young thing!
I plucked the lilac's fragrant snow
From a tall bush wet with the dews of spring—
This is its very last leaf, I know.

III

You shook your hair with the dew besprinkled;
You placed the bloom in your fair young breast;
And over the grass your little feet twinkled
As we took the path that seemed the best.
Gay with the daring of Twenty-one
I drank the wine of my life that day:
What words were uttered, what deeds were done,
Over the hills and far away?

IV

I know where beautiful Amy's hid :

I know that if I should dig down there

And shatter a hideous coffin-lid

I should find her bones—perchance her hair.

But I never shall know until I die,

Looking my last on the weary sun,

Where is the strength that once was I—

In what dark grave lies Twenty-one.

VIOLETS AT HOME.

I

O HAPPY buds of violet !
I give them to my sweet, and she
Puts them where something sweeter yet
Must always be.

II

White violets find whiter rest :
For fairest flowers how fair a fate !
For me remain, O fragrant breast !
Inviolate.

ELEÄNORE.

I

O fairer than vermilion
Shed upon Western skies
Was the blush of that sweet Castilian
Girl, with the deep brown eyes—
As her happy heart grew firmer,
In the strange bright days of yore,
When she heard young Edward murmur,
'I love thee, Eleänore!'

II

Sweeter than musical cadence
Of the wind amid cedar and lime,
Is love to a timorous maiden's
Heart in the fresh spring-time :
Sweeter than waves that mutter
And break on a sinuous shore,
Are the songs her fancies utter
To brown-eyed Eleänore.

III

They twain went forth together
Away o'er the midland main,
Through the golden summer weather,
To Syria's mystic plain ;
Together, toil and danger
And the death of their loved ones bore,
And perils from Paynim, stranger
Than death to Eleänore.

IV

Where Lincoln's towers of wonder
Soar high o'er the vale of Trent—
Their lives were torn asunder;
To her home the good Queen went.
Her corse to the tomb he carried,
With grief at his heart's stern core;
And where'er at night they tarried
Rose a cross to Eleänore.

V

As ye trace a meteor's onset
By a line of silver rain—
As ye trace a regal sunset
By streaks of a saffron stain—
So to the Minster holy
At the west of London's roar,
May ye mark how, sadly, slowly,
Passed the corse of Eleänore.

VI

Back to where lances quiver—
Straight back, by tower and town,
By hill and wold and river—
For the love of Scotland's Crown:
But ah! there is woe within him
For the face he shall see no more;
And conquest cannot win him
From the love of Eleänore.

VII

Years after, sternly dying
In his tent by the Solway Sea,
With the breezes of Scotland flying
O'er the wild sands wide and free,
His dim thoughts sadly wander
To the happy days of yore,
And he sees, in the gray sky yonder,
The eyes of his Eleänore.

VIII

Time must destroy those Crosses,
Raised by the Poet-King :
But so long as the blue sea tosses,
So long as the skylarks sing,
So long as London's river
Glides stately down to the Nore,
Men shall remember ever
How he loved Queen Eleänore.

CHARING CROSS.

I

THE paltry fountain plashes
In the Square of Trafalgar:
The swift Vesuvian flashes
For a poet's calm cigar.
And I think of that warrior daring
Who the Sword of England bore,
And who raised on the Green of Charing
A Cross to his Eleänore.

II

Who, after years six hundred,
Fitly can understand
How Wallace fought and plundered,
How Edward ruled the land?
Love is immortal only:
And this we see full clear,
That the lady who left him lonely
To his fiery heart was dear.

III

Vaguer and ever vaster
Time's great processions go;
Here the nation slew its master
'Mid January's snow.
Deeds glorious, deeds abhorrent,
Have been wrought within our ken,
But the life is a mighty torrent
Which was but a rivulet then.

IV

It has depths beyond our plummet,
Its speed is for thought too fast ;
We cannot gauge or sum it,
Or guess if its power will last.
But the future teems with wonder
To the man who stands apart,
Listening as beats in thunder
The pulse of England's heart.

PARIS AND TROY.

Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?—*François Villon.*

I

WHERE is Paris, the beautiful city?
Has it dissolved like a mirage wondrous—
Its ladies bright and gallants witty,
Passed like an earthquake shock from under us?
Swept away by the onset thunderous
Of Teutons mad with the battle joy?
Fate and time from beauty sunder us:
Where is the famous city Troy?

II

Where is Napoleon? Where each captain
Who rode in his steel-clad train but lately,
Every one rare visions rapt in
Of a France that loomed o'er Europe greatly,
Of a Gallic Empire, strong and stately—
A baby-giant with war for a toy?
Where do those phantoms march sedately?
But where is Hector who fought for Troy?

III

Where are the ladies who roamed at large in
That sweet city, 'mid glee incessant,
Drinking wine of moist Marne margin
Under the soft moon's silver crescent,
With lively laughter effervescent,
And gay love-games that are loth to cloy?
Where is that ecstasy evanescent?
But where is Helen who loved in Troy?

THE SWALLOW.

I

O SWALLOW, flying by windy ways.
Over leagues of white sea-foam,
To the nest you left in the autumn days
Under eaves of an English home—
Voyage right swiftly, wandering bird,
A speck in the distant blue,
For the pulse of life in the leaves is stirred,
And white doves coo.

II

Have you wintered away in the Cyclades
Or on marge of mysterious Nile?
No matter, so that the summer sees
You back in our western isle.
But come, more swift than the sailing ship,
For the skies are calm and clear,
And I long to see your brown wing dip
In stream and mere.

III

Yes, I long for the magic of indolent hours,
The glamour of amorous eyes,
When the breeze which fluttered 'mid fern and flowers
In the noon's rich languor dies,
When bees grow drowsy in honey-bells,
And the brown lark sleeps in his nest,
And a vernal vision of gladness swells
One soft white breast.

IV

Yes, I long to float on a haunted lake,
And the weary past forget,
And the thirst of my restless heart to slake
With the songs of Amoret.
So, hither, swallow, from Memphian fane,
Or Greek isle set in the blue:
Fly fast to your English home again—
Love comes with you.

A LITTLE LECTURE.

1

Sit still, child, if you know the way,
Cross your white arms upon your breast,
Let the dark glory of your hair
From bands escape.
'Tis weary always to be gay;
And sweet is silence, sweet is rest:
We drink the juices of despair
From Life's crushed grape.

II

Why should I lecture? You are young,
And tameless as a dragon-fly,
And beautiful to look upon,
And sweet to touch.
Nothing you know of nerves unstrung,
Nor can believe that you will die,
And go where other girls have gone.
I ask too much.

III

Pshaw! Flutter like a pretty bird,
Outrun the wind, outlaugh the brooks,
Flout the frail ferns with flying feet,
Outblush the rose;
Let your young petulant voice be heard
Joyous through all the forest-nooks.
But have you got a soul, my sweet?
Who knows? Who knows?

'DON'T LET HIM CATCH YOU!'

I

On Maidenhead Thicket the moonlight of May
Throws magical beauty unknown to the day:
By the old turnpike gate where the bird-catcher dwells,
The note of a nightingale gurgles and swells.
Deep hid in the leafage of slumbering elms
She sings the sad song of the Daulian realms—
Of the web that was woven, the child that was slain,
The flight into æther sore stricken with pain.
Though nothing the bird-catcher knows about Greek,
He fancies that nightingale's song is unique:
And I said when the passionate music I heard—
'Don't let him catch you, beautiful bird!'

II

Not very far off, at the very same hour,
Two loiter together 'neath chestnuts in flower:
Faint blossoms of night give an odour divine,
Cool breath of the west is more joyous than wine.
He tells her that wondrous old story we know
(How sweet 'twas to murmur it, lustrums ago!)
And she, with the music of anguish above,
Drinks perilous draughts of the vintage of love.
Does he know, whose warm breath is so close to her cheek,
More of love than the bird-catcher knows about Greek?
If not, it were time just to whisper a word:
'Don't let him catch you, beautiful bird!'

RIVER OF DART.

The Dart flows in a wild tumultuous stream; and its 'cry,' in the stillness of night, may be heard far from its banks. It is subject to frequent and sudden inundation. 'Dart came down last night' is an expression often in the mouths of the moormen; and it is said that a year never passes without one person at the least being drowned in the river. Hence the local rhyme:

River of Dart! O river of Dart!
Every year thou claimest a heart.—*Murray.*

I

River of Dart! O river of Dart!
Every year thou claimest a heart.
Beautiful river, through fringe of fern
Gliding swift to the southern sea,

Such is the fame thy wild waves earn,
Such is the dirge men sing by thee:
For the cry of Dart is the voice of doom,
When the floods are out in the moorland gloom.

II

River of Dart! beside thy stream
In the sweet Devon summer I linger and dream;
For thy mystic pools are dark and deep,
And thy flying waters strangely clear,
And the crags are wild by the Lover's Leap,
And thy song of sorrow I will not hear,
While the fierce moor-falcon floats aloft,
And I gaze on eyes that are loving and soft.

III

River of Dart! the praise be thine
For the loving eyes that are meeting mine!

Where thy swift trout leap, and thy swallows dip,
'Neath a gray tor's shadow 'twas mine to know
The pure first touch of a virgin lip,
And the virgin pant of a breast of snow.
River of Dart! O river of Dart!
By thy waters wild I have found a heart.

A SPRIG OF MAY.

I

THE daughters of Summer faint with languor,
But maiden May has a sprightlier song;
Her fluttering west wind cools the anger
Of Apollo her wooer, whose shafts are strong:
Young blossoms, young birds are her dainty darlings,
And the raucous talk of her eager starlings
Welcomes the dawn with a curious clangour
When the lark's aloft, and the shadows are long.

II

May in our London too hath an atti-
-tude that is charming to you and me:
For her gay bird-voice is the voice of Patti;—
Sang never lark with a rarer glee.
And the sunlight of May has power actinic
To gladden the heart of the veriest cynic,
When miraculous Art's serene beati-
-tudes in Trafalgar Square we see.

III

May on the river! Verily fill a
Bumper to honour her: who condemns?
Dining at eve in a pleasant villa,
While wit and poetry's rarest gems
Aid the exquisite wine's swift sparkle,
And under the oak-trees patriarchal
We see the swans their young flotilla
Piloting home over sinuous Thames.

A JULY FERN-LEAF.

Mors aurem vellens, '*Vivite*!' ait, '*Venio.*'

I

WHITE feet in the fairy fern—
Quick wings in a chrysolite sky—
And an amethyst lamp in the west to burn,
When the cool dusk hours for which lovers yearn
Pass in sweet silence by;
Over summer seas
Thou bringest these
Hither, July.

II

Stern hours have the merciless Fates
Plotted for all who die:
But looking down upon Richmond's aits,
Where the merles sing low to their amorous mates,
Who cares to ask them why?
We'll have wit, love, wine,
Ere thy days divine
Wither, July

III

For the blossom of youth must fade,
And the vigour of life must fly:
Yet to-day is ours with its odorous shade,
And the loving eyes which soon betrayed
Dreams in the heart that lie.
Swift life's stream flows,
But alas! who knows
Whither, July?

THE WAYSIDE WELL.

FULL of beauty is the wayside well,
Overcanopied with leafage pleasant,
Where the spirits of coolness love to dwell
'Mid the heat incessant.

II

Here you see the weary wayfarer
Cool himself beneath the leafy shadow,
While the long grass scarcely seems to stir
In the unshaven meadow.

III

Here full often rest the smoking team,
Toiling movers of the broad-wheeled waggon:
Here the vagrant artist stays to dream
O'er his pocket-flagon.

IV

Hither also trips the rustic maiden
Singing blithely through the wind-swept barley,
With her dark-red earthen pitcher laden,
In the morning early.

V

Talk of palm-tree shade and Arab lymph
In the bosom of a green oasis:
Talk of water which the Naiad nymph
'Mid dark Tempe places:

VI

Talk of icy wine Italian quaffed
In a cave of Pulciano's mountain :
There is nothing like a joyous draught
From the wayside fountain.

RAIN AND TEARS.

I

O SKY, thou art far too blue !
Pine for the sweet soft rain the tremulous ferns
And the scorched grasses and the blossom-urns,
Ay, in his lonely glade the great oak yearns :
Even water-lilies swoon
In the long languid noon,
Since slow and shallow is the streamlet's lymph,
Home of the Naiad nymph :
O sterile sky, yield thy refreshing dew !

II

O love, thou art far too gay!
Thy lips laugh always and thy bright eyes shine,
And both are mine, you darling, both are mine,
And love is sweeter than the summer's wine:
Yet, even in thy sleep,
Just for a moment weep,
Or let some fanciful and foolish fears
Soften those eyes with tears.
O love, I want some tears to kiss away!

MY AUNT'S SPECTRE.

I

THEY tell me (but I really can't
Imagine such a rum thing),
IT is the phantom of my Aunt,
Who ran away—or something.

II

IT is the very worst of bores :
(My Aunt was most delightful).
IT prowls about the corridors,
And utters noises frightful.

III

At midnight through the rooms It glides,
Behaving very coolly,
Our hearts all throb against our sides—
The lights are burning bluely.

IV

The lady, in her living hours,
Was the most charming vixen
That ever this poor sex of ours
Delighted to play tricks on.

V

Yes, that's her portrait on the wall,
In quaint old-fangled bodice:
Her eyes are blue—her waist is small—
A ghost! Pooh, pooh,—a goddess!

VI

A fine patrician shape, to suit
My dear old father's sister—
Lips softly curved, a dainty foot:
Happy the man that kissed her!

VII

Light hair of crisp irregular curl
Over fair shoulders scattered—
Egad, she was a pretty girl,
Unless Sir Thomas flattered!

VIII

And who the deuce, in these bright days,
Could possibly expect her
To take to dissipated ways,
And plague us as a spectre?

THE TRINITY OF ART.

L'Art a besoin ou de la solitude, ou de la misère, ou de la passion.—*Alexandre Dumas, fils.*

I

Ay, solitude, agony, passion!
This marvellous trinity brings
From afar the fierce fancies that flash on
The poet, who dreams and who sings.
Wild wandering, happy and lonely,
Through stream-haunted woodlands serene,
There were days when his joyaunce was only
With Nature, sole goddess and queen.

II

But from loneliness, indolence, beauty,
We pass to the turmoil of life;
Sharp steel are the fetters of duty,
Bite keenly the acids of strife.
Ah, Genius, too free is thy charter
For the plausible Philistine's rules;
So the world makes the poet a martyr,
And the poet takes vengeance on fools.

III

Far sweetest of all that he utters
Are the snatches of passionate rhyme
Which come when a loving heart flutters
On his, in the royal summer-time.
Then the wine of his life hath bright foam on't,
Then joy is more puissant than tears,
Then a brief keen miraculous moment
Outweighs the slow torture of years.

AN OLD FOGY ON CHRISTMAS.

I

'Tis Christmas, but changed are the fashions
Since I first heard its clamorous bells,
For the girls of the period have passions,
And the boys of the period are swells;
Yet a charm on one's memory dwells.
Long ago there were terrible spectres
And marvellous riddles to guess,
In days ere the railway directors
Put on the Express.

II

'Neath mistletoe, loved by the Druid,
You might then snatch a frolicsome kiss;
And the punch of that time was a fluid
That nobody voted amiss;
And the snapdragon—didn't it hiss!
Every girl in your heart was a lodger
Who met you with mischievous glance:
And O what a romp was Sir Roger
De Coverley's dance!

III

'Mid beauties so buxom and lissom
One forgot that the winter was cold;
But why does it seem that I miss 'em?
Perchance I'm a fogy, grown old,
Whose life is a tale that is told.

When a man is approaching to fifty
He seldom breaks into his nights,
And is apt to be studiously thrifty
Of violent delights.

IV

But wherefore one's age be revealing?
Leave that to the Registry books.
A man is as old as he's feeling;
A woman, as old as she looks;
Don't eagles live longer than rooks?
Besides, in this festival season
'Tis fit that great truths should be told:
'Whom the gods love, die young'—for this reason,
They cannot grow old.

SONG BY THE RIVER.

I

SWEET, sweet, with the fairy feet,
Hasten down to the river-side,
Where the lilies float, and thy lover's boat
Waits for thee on the rippling tide—
Waits for thee,
While on meadow and tree
Magical sunset-lights fall free.

II

Now, sweet flower, for a happy hour,—
Thames beneath and the sky above :
Swiftly trip—there's an eager lip
Waits for thine with the thirst of love—
Waits for thine,
While a breeze divine
Ruffles the darkening woodland line.

III

Sad, though sweet, on the lawns to meet
By tranquil Thames—for a voice of fear
Whispereth that the angel Death
Waits for thee in some far-off year—
Waits for thee—
And our trysting tree
Other lovers shall often see.

IV

Wherefore haste, nor a moment waste
Of young love's exquisite golden days:
Dream not of night when an hour's delight
Waits for thee in the sunset haze—
Waits for thee
As the summer sea
For the river flowing by lawn and lea.

WINTER IN BRIGHTON.

Vides, ut alta stet nive candidum
Soracte.

I

WILL there be snowfall on lofty Soracte
After a summer so tranquil and torrid?
Whoso detests the east wind, as a fact he
Thinks 'twill be horrid.
But there are zephyrs more mild by the ocean,
Every keen touch of the snowdrifts to lighten;
If to be cosy and snug you've a notion—
Winter in Brighton!

II

Politics nobody cares about. Spurn a
Topic whereby all our happiness suffers.
Dolts in the back streets of Brighton return a
Couple of duffers.
Fawcett and White in the Westminster Hades
Strive the reporters' misfortunes to heighten.
What does it matter? Delicious young ladies
Winter in Brighton

III

Good is the turtle for luncheon at Mutton's,
Good is the hock that they give you at Bacon's
Mainwaring's fruit in the bosoms of gluttons
Yearning awakens;
Buckstone comes hither, delighting the million,
'Mong the theatrical minnows a Triton;
Dickens and Lemon pervade the Pavilion:—
Winter in Brighton!

IV

If you've a thousand a year, or a minute—
If you're a D'Orsay, whom every one follows—
If you've a head (it don't matter what's in it)
Fair as Apollo's—
If you approve of flirtations, good dinners,
Seascapes divine which the merry winds whiten,
Nice little saints and still nicer young sinners—
Winter in Brighton !

November 1868.

A GAME OF CHESS.

I

TERRACE and lawn are white with frost,
Whose fretwork flowers upon the panes—
A mocking dream of summer, lost
'Mid winter's icy chains.

II

White-hot, indoors, the great logs gleam,
Veiled by a flickering flame of blue:
I see my love as in a dream—
Her eyes are azure, too.

III

She binds her hair behind her ears
(Each little ear so like a shell),
Touches her ivory Queen, and fears
She is not playing well.

IV

For me, I think of nothing less :
I think how those pure pearls become her—
And which is sweetest, winter chess
Or garden strolls in summer.

V

O linger, frost, upon the pane !
O faint blue flame, still softly rise !
O, dear one, thus with me remain,
That I may watch thine eyes !

THUNDERWIND CASTLE.

I

THUNDERWIND CASTLE! High it stands,
Looking over the neighbouring lands—
On the upmost edge of a mighty peak
Sawn by some deluge to form oblique:
A wondrous thunderous pile it is,
Scarred by a terrible emphasis.

II

You should hear the wind on that wild hill's crest:
Why, it blew the young hawk out of his nest;
And it blew the ghosts—there were ghosts by scores—
Like a laundress's rags through the corridors;
And it blew by night, and it blew by day,
Till it blew the lords of the land away.

III

It is summer now, and it looks full fair,
Set like a gem in the gold-blue air;
But when the storm its stonework splinters
In the murkest nights of the wildest winters,
'Tis a place that men should shun, unless
They can gaze upon shapes of hideousness.

IV

Wild blew the wind as Ralph Loraine
Lay on his couch in maddening pain;
Knelt beside him his stately wife,
Longing at heart to end his life.
Came a sudden surging sound, and he
Started. '*Only the wind*,' said she.

V

Only the wind! 'Twas the march of men,
Fiendish foes from the Dark Wolf's glen;
And the Dark Wolf's self at their head was there,
With his red right arm and his dagger bare!
And by murderous hands the good knight died,
And Alice Loraine was his foeman's bride.

VI

Only the wind! It roared one night,
When Alice died in a mad affright;
And it roared, and rent the Dark Wolf's sails,
And dashed his ship on the coast of Wales;
It will roar through the long black nights, until
No castle stands on the lonely hill.

MERLIN.

I

MERLIN, the great magician,
Quelled by a woman's hand,
Lies under the mighty oak-trees
In the forest of Broceliande.

II

The fever of life comes never
To fret his poet-brain:
He has slept a thousand years, and shall sleep
A thousand years again.

III

Dews falls soft on the turf there,
Young birds twitter above:
Merlin sleeps, and surely sleep
Is better than aught save love.

IV

Merlin sleeps, while the winters
Freeze, and the summers bloom,
And the old oaks whisper softly . . .
He is here till the Day of Doom.

V

O happy happy Merlin,
Afar in the forest deep!
To thee alone of the sons of men
Gave a woman the gift of sleep.

LAZY ART.

I

THEY say that in a sleepy state
You cannot catch a weasel:
But I caught pretty witty Kate
Half-sleeping at her easel.

II

She gazes over emerald turf
To where the river's wave is,
And sees the gardener, swinking serf,
And listens to the mavis.

III

That turf the shadows of the limes
With tremulous patterns stencil—
That thrush's song beats all our rhymes:
So Kate has dropt her pencil.

IV

Upon the lotos-lover's fate
Who will may cast their strictures:
She's a delicious picture, Kate—
So why should she paint pictures?

MY THRUSH.

I

All through the sultry hours of June,
From morning blithe to golden noon,
And till the star of evening climbs
The gray-blue East, a world too soon,
There sings a Thrush amid the limes.

II

God's poet, hid in foliage green,
Sings endless songs, himself unseen;
Right seldom come his silent times.
Linger, ye summer hours serene!
Sing on, dear Thrush, amid the limes!

III

Nor from these confines wander out,
Where with old gun bucolic lout
Commits all day his murderous crimes:
Though cherries ripe are sweet, no doubt,
Sweeter thy song amid the limes.

IV

May I not dream God sends thee there,
Thou mellow angel of the air,
Even to rebuke my earthlier rhymes
With music's soul, all praise and prayer?
Is that thy lesson in the limes?

V

Closer to God art thou than I:
His minstrel thou, whose brown wings fly
Through silent æther's sunnier climes.
Ah, never may thy music die!
Sing on, dear Thrush, amid the limes!

THE BEST THING SAID TO-NIGHT.

AROUND the fire, past midnight, when the girls
Were sleeping, let us hope their beauty-sleep,
In nests of delicate fragrance, there remained
Just two or three to smoke that last cigar
And taste the sweet o' the night. Quoth one of us,
Knocking the white ash indolently off,
Lest it should fall upon his lounging-coat
Like sudden snow upon a purple moor,
'*What was the best thing said to-night?*' A flow
Of talk succeeded: one man's epigram

Another's pretty speech to Isabel,
The wild young poet's lyric oratory
Halfway twixt the Agora and Colney Hatch,
The impromptu in the style of *Vivian Grey*
About Disraeli—these and fifty more
The men discussed until discussion yawned
And the last seltzer quenched the last cigar,
And everybody went to bed. But I,
I knew full well the best thing said that night,
When she who wore the buds of cyclamen
Stood in the odorous twilight 'mid the flowers,
While a caressing spray of some white bloom
Over her rose-flusht shoulder fell. I knew,
And wrote it down on Vitellian* leaf—
A little tablet for love's lusive rhyme.
Who will, may read.

---

* *Non dum legerit hos licet puella,*
Novit quid cupiant Vitelliani.

I

O darling eyelids' delicate droop !
O little sweet mouth, so red, so pure !
There in the twilight while I stoop,
Beautiful Amoret looks demure.
There's a word to whisper : who can guess ?
Will it be *No*, sweet ? Will it be *Yes ?*

II

Listen the flowers that word to learn
Which the little sweet mouth must say to me ;
Faintly it flutters the fairy fern :
What will it be ? O what will it be ?
Tender the gleam in those eyes of light
As she says *the best thing said to-night !*

COMING OF AGE

I

THE poet may tread earth sadly,
Yet is he Dreamland's king,
And the fays at his bidding gladly
Visions of beauty bring;
But his joys will be rarer, finer,
Away from this earthly stage,
When he, who is now a minor,
Comes of age.

II

For him soft leaflets cluster
Of violet, ivy, and vine;
For him leaps livelier lustre
From purple depth of wine:
Pauses the song of the Sirens,
Closes the Sybil's page,
Till he, whom earth environs,
Comes of age.

III

He seems to the moiling million
A very pestilent knave;
Yet the sky is his pavilion,
And the maiden moon his slave;
And the sea, with its myriad laughter,
And maddening freaks of rage,
Owns him who, a king hereafter,
Comes of age.

IV

The wailing winds and the thunder,
And the roar of a war that whirls,
Breaking great realms asunder,
And the merry songs of girls,
All in one music mingle,
All the great joys presage,
Of the poet who, royal and single,
Comes of age.

V

Roll on, O tardy cycle,
Whose death is the poet's birth!
Blow soon, great trump of Michael,
Shatter the crust of earth!
Let the slow spheres turn faster;
Hasten the heritage
Of him who, as life's true master,
Comes of age!

NOTES

ON

'THE INN OF STRANGE MEETINGS.'

39. *That sweet enemy, France.*

From a sonnet by Sir Philip Sydney.

97. *I'm your grandmamma.*
You've seen my portrait down at Creçi Court.

The reader will be reminded of Mr. Frederick Locker's delightful lines suggested by a portrait of his grandmother by Romney:

'Beneath a summer tree
Her maiden reverie
Has a chain;'
Her ringlets are in taste—
What an arm! and what a waist
For an arm!'

This poem has suggested a charming sketch by G. D. Leslie, A.R.A., which was engraved in the *Graphic* newspaper of April 6, 1870.

I think Mr. Disraeli has used *Creçi* as the name of one of the numerous country houses he has described with fluent brilliancy

in *Lothair*. But as I used it in a volume called *Summer Songs*, published by Saunders and Otley in 1860, I venture to adhere to it.

120. *Maddeningly beautiful . . . and five feet one.*

'She was a very pretty nun;
Sad, delicate, and five feet one.'

Praed: *The Troubadour.*

261. *An inveterate detester*
Of festivals.

Sir George Cornewall Lewis remarked that life would be tolerable, but for its amusements.

391. *The robins singing in the evenglome.*

For the beautiful word *evenglome* I am indebted to the *Early English* of Mr. Barnes, the delicious idyllist of Dorsetshire.

512. *A worser Troy.*

Coleridge's saying that 'Frenchmen are like gunpowder—in the mass dangerous, but in single grains smutty and contemptible,' has been too terribly verified since I began this poem.

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